

# Testimony By The Honorable Karen Haas

Clerk of the House

Mr. Chairman, Madam Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before you today regarding the ten-year technology vision for the House of Representatives.

The Office of the Clerk has been engaged in this project since its inception in 2004. My predecessor, Mr. Jeff Trandahl, and key senior managers of the Office have lent to the effort their insight, institutional and operational knowledge, and their opinions of how the House of Representatives can best deploy technology to the greater good of the institution and the public that it serves. I was introduced to the project shortly after becoming Clerk late last year, having had the opportunity to attend a roundtable discussion with other House officers and officials. I hope the information I am providing here today about the technology role of the Office of the Clerk will help further the progress of our efforts to ensure the House of Representatives proceeds along a path to greater efficiency.

My comments, Mr. Chairman, will focus on: 1) our role as a provider of electronic information to Members and staff; 2) the automation of the management and production of official legislative documents; and 3) other issues and challenges for the institution and related agencies.

Dating to the 1970's, the Office of the Clerk has been an active partner in advancing technology in the House. Such advancements include: the first automation of the financial and payroll systems by one of my predecessors; the management and operation of electronic voting following its introduction in 1973; the televised Floor proceedings beginning in 1978; the introduction of extensible mark-up language for the creation and editing of legislative documents; providing an extensive resource of legislative and institutional information through the Clerk's website; and the first House deployment of electronic filing and the use of digital signature authentication in 2004. Throughout the years, the Office has responded to growing

demand for information and access.

Earlier

this year, in partnership with the Chief Administrative Officer, we successfully migrated LIMS, the Legislative Information Management System, from the House mainframe to a state-of-the-art UNIX platform and assumed complete responsibility for the system. This culmination of a five-year project will yield both cost savings for the House and provide greater performance and versatility of the system. LIMS is unknown to many outside the institutional legislative community, but its importance is unrivaled, as it provides the foundation of metadata that makes possible public access to legislative information through the Library of Congress THOMAS system and GPOAccess. Since its inception in the early 1980's, Clerk staff have been the primary users of LIMS, managing the input of legislative information into a system which to name a few of its applications, numbers bills, reports, and documents; creates and prints the daily Calendars of the House; and provides the on-line, real-time summary of House Floor proceedings.

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subject of automating the management and production of official legislative information, the Office of the Clerk, since the late 1990's, has been a partner with various legislative entities within and outside of the House to implement a vision of this Committee to bring standardization to the creation and transfer of legislative documents. Following a Committee-supported feasibility study, conducted by the Office of the Clerk, in conjunction with the Secretary of the Senate and the respective Legislative Counsels of both Houses of Congress, this Committee and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration agreed on the use of extensible mark-up language, otherwise known as XML, for the exchange of legislative documents. Since then, and through the support of this Committee, Mr. Chairman, the Clerk and the House Legislative Counsel, in cooperation with the Secretary of the Senate, the Library of Congress and the Government Printing Office (GPO) have customized XML-based applications which allow House Counsel to draft over 98 percent of bills, resolutions and amendments in XML. This is important and relevant to the issue at hand because it represents the underlying cross-organizational standardization of text that needs to occur in order to more fully exploit the power and range of electronic dissemination of legislative text.

At the core of this effort was the establishment of a coordinating body involving all the parties, the XML Technical Committee, that ensures that all documents exchanged are developed in a manner that is coherent to all

organizations. The success of this project is illustrative of the advantages of an integrated, institutional approach to the production of legislative documents electronically. The process of producing legislation has been simplified, and the tools provided to the drafters allow them to focus on the contents of the document and free them from other considerations. Cooperative efforts with LIS at the Library of Congress are designed to expand access to these documents and to facilitate search, merge, and presentation of selected data. In addition to this, the technology embraced by the Office of the Clerk opens the door to abundant generic tools which make it easier for interested parties to search through documents, compare different versions and highlight their differences, and provide access to merged views of contents stemming from different documents.

We have primarily focused our development and implementation on the relationship amongst the Clerk, the Secretary of the Senate, Legislative Counsel, and the GPO. With help from the Committee, XML development outreach has progressed with various committees of the House and we have been working as well with the Office of the Law Revision Counsel and the Rules Committee to coordinate and share with them our expertise in this area.

Nevertheless, there is much more work to be done before we reap the full benefits of a fully electronic process for creation, distribution and presentation of legislative documents. The scope of the initial effort was limited in its inception and must be expanded to allow every entity in the legislative process access to these tools. Future plans should include the creation and exchange of additional legislative documents in XML, committee reports and hearings, House Calendars, and journals. This is not a simple endeavor, and will require significant resources and involvement from all those who are party to the legislative process. Different entities will have to come together and agree on adopting common standards and procedures that constitute a viable compromise for all involved. All this, in turn, can only happen if the effort is part of a fully coordinated plan that ensures that all parties are committed to its success.

In between the issue of standardization and access to data is the matter of the official version. To date, paper is regarded as the official version for legislative documents. For example, with introduced bills, although an electronic version accompanies nearly 99 percent of introduced measures, an original signed hard copy must be submitted on the floor of the House while it

is in session in order for it to qualify. While respecting the primacy of the printed version as the official version, it is important to consider the importance of having a means to associate the electronic version of a piece of legislation to the printed, official version that derives from it.

This is critical if Members and staff are going to be allowed access to reliable electronic documents.

The solution to this problem lies in the area of electronic authentication. As I mentioned earlier in my remarks Mr. Chairman, we have deployed the first and only official use of electronic authentication in the form of an outsourced digital signature certificate for the filing with the Clerk by outside entities of Lobbying Disclosure Act filings. Since electronic filing under that program became mandatory in 2006, we have realized an over 80 percent on-time compliance rate, with the filings becoming instantly accessible for public viewing on our terminals at the Legislative Resource Center. We would envision that agreement on an electronic authentication standard and mechanism suitable for legislative and other documents would be one of the critical areas of concern for the House of Representatives in the near future.

With regard to on-time availability of legislative information in committee or House chamber settings, I believe I share the view of those who have preceded me, and Members and officials, who recognize that it is not just a matter of deploying equipment and software - but rather it is a fundamental policy issue of determining how our rules and procedures would have to be changed to accommodate the various types of immediate access being discussed.

There are additional examples of areas that could benefit from standardization of technology and requirements. Currently, the House lacks uniform standards for the drafting and production of committee reports. This makes it very difficult to provide the Committees a set of universal tools that could be used for report drafting.

Yet another area where we desperately need improvement is with documents required for filing with the Congress. For example, under current law the information that must be provided to the Senate and the House by a registered lobbyist is mandated but the process for filing is not. As you are aware, in the House we require registrants to file electronically while the Senate does not. This has resulted in two entirely different computer systems and data bases that provide challenges to the filer, challenges for the offices of the Secretary of the Senate and the House Clerk as well as additional expense.

These are only a few examples of areas where coordinated policy guidance and established procedures could help the efficiency of our process, reduce cost and benefit members, staff and the public as we strive to make accurate information available as quickly as possible.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I would like to again thank the Committee for the invitation to appear here today. The Committee should be commended for the leadership you have shown in moving the House forward technologically while recognizing many of the important challenges we must deal with as an institution. I look forward to continuing the partnership that has developed through this process and to further advancements in the use of technology in our legislative process.